Global warming and climate change have put the environment at the top of the political agenda. With many environmental problems stemming from workplaces, trade unions are now tackling these issues. This booklet gives practical information and guidance to trade unionists who want to take action on the environment.

COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION

The environment and climate change

— a guide for union reps

Environment and Climate Change - A Guide For Union Reps

The CWU and LRD have produced this booklet to support the strong desire within our Union to change our workplaces to make them more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

There is overwhelming support from Union members and Representatives for more to be done to combat global warming and to promote good environmental practices at work through robust environmental policies. Employers need to do more to improve their environmental performance and have in place strategies to reduce carbon emissions.

Environmental initiatives can bring benefits to employers and its employees. Our aim is to promote good environmental practices at work that will benefit workers, employers and the wider community.

The benefits from good environmental policies and practices are best delivered through a genuine partnership between employer and employees, in consultation such as already exists on health and safety issues. We believe that Businesses and Unions can make a big difference if they act together in partnership on environmental issues.

Poor environmental performance will become increasingly costly. Waste and energy inefficiency costs money and the Government is committed to using economic instruments to meet it's environmental objectives and businesses will increasingly have to recognise, even on purely financial grounds, it makes good business sense to get ahead of the game.

The CWU has a history of supporting environmental protection and equitable environmental workplace policies. There are limits to the capacity of the Earth's ecosystem to absorb pollution and provide natural resources. We must therefore find a way to meet the needs and aspirations of everyone for a better quality of life now and for future generations by avoiding environmental damage and ensuring that pollution and environmental degradation do not automatically increase.

I hope that this unique, fundamental reference hand book for CWU Reps will provide practical guidance and environmental tools to assist you to take action on the environment at work. It includes results form the LRD workplace survey of over 1000 workplace contacts, including a large number of CWU Reps who participated. The CWU Health, Safety & Environment Department is also supporting the case for legal rights for trade union reps to take up environment issues and we hope you will find this booklet both interesting and helpful.

Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer

contents

Introduction 2

1. The scale of the problem 3

The environment 3
Global climate change 6
The causes of climate change 8
Climate change in the UK 10

2. Workplace action to protect the environment 13

Workers and the environment 13
The Labour Research Department survey 13
Energy efficiency 13
Waste recycling 15
Transport 17
The role of union reps 17

3. Tools for union reps 20

Model agreements 20
Joint environmental policies 21
Eco-auditing 26

4. Trade union policies and the environment 30

Trade unions and the environment 30
Trade unions and climate change 32
The case for legal rights for environment reps 36

5. Strategies to protect the environment 40

Government policy 40
Environment groups, campaigns and demands 44

Further information 48

Introduction

The threat from further **global warming** has catapulted the environment to the top of the political agenda with climate change a major concern. As many environmental problems originate from **workplaces** or from **work-related activities**, including a significant proportion of carbon emissions, trade unions are on the frontline of environmental action.

The labour movement has always been at the forefront in taking up hazards in the workplace in order to protect workers and make the working environment safe. Trade unions are now tackling the challenges posed by practices which damage the environment. As representatives of workers' interests as producers and consumers, trade unions are in a unique position to secure fair and equitable environmental policies.

This booklet is designed to give practical information and guidance to trade unionists who want to take action on the environment.

Chapter 1 examines the *effects* of environmental damage, especially climate change. It gives union reps some key facts and figures to argue the case for action with their employer and with members.

Chapter 2 contains the results of a recent LRD survey and contains examples of union **activity in workplaces** to protect the environment.

Chapter 3 provides some **tools for union reps** to take up environmental issues. It includes model agreements, policies and audit forms.

Chapter 4 sets out **union policies** on the environment and puts the case for legal rights for trade union reps to take up environmental issues at work.

Chapter 5 analyses government strategies for protecting the environment, along with alternatives proposed by environmental campaigns.

1. The scale of the problem

The environment

The environment covers a huge range of interdependent problems: flood, drought, desertification, water shortage, species extinction, deforestation, storm surges, malnutrition, disease, soil erosion and waste. The natural and social dimensions of the environment can be clearly linked:

Waste

According to the government's Environment Agency, the UK produces over 339 million tonnes of waste annually. Demolition and construction accounts for a third of it, mining and quarrying 30% and industry and commerce 19%. Households generate around 11% of waste — equivalent to over 500kg per person per year. Two thirds of municipal waste is buried in landfill sites.

The waste industry is also **hazardous for workers**. *Mapping health and safety standards in the UK waste industry*, a research report for the Health and Safety Executive found that, in 2001-2002, the number of fatal incidents in the waste industry was over **ten times** the national average and accident rates **four times** the national average.

The incidents predominantly occurred to refuse/recycling collection workers who manually handle and sort waste.

Pollution

Pollution levels are better in the UK today than for decade but there are still around **one thousand** serious incidents every year, mainly affecting water and land.

And air pollution remains a serious problem. A report on the **Urban Environment** by the parliamentary Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution found that air pollution was responsible for 24,000 premature deaths in Britain every year and reduced average life expectancy by around eight months. At least 2,000 additional deaths in the UK occurred because of the summer heat wave in 2003.

The causes of environmental problems

There is a tendency to blame consumers or households for environmental problems and make the solutions simply a matter of individual lifestyle changes. Of course, individuals do make choices that damage the environment but the causes are **systematic and collective**.

The labour movement has long been concerned about preventing pollution and protecting the natural environment and in voicing those concerns it has consistently emphasised the role of employers and governments in causing environmental problems. Trade unions, in particular, have highlighted the pursuit of profit and the desire to cut costs as key drivers in environmental disasters.

The UK's worst polluters

One way to identify the causes of environment problems is to look at the worst polluters. The Environment Agency provided the Labour Research Department (LRD) with the following data on the largest fines from its prosecutions since 2000:

Ten highest fines for environmental offences, 2000-2006

Company	Fine (£)	Year	Sector
Cemex UK Cement Ltd	400,000	2006	minerals
Thames Water Utilities Ltd	250,000	2000	water
Cleansing Services Group Ltd	250,000	2003	waste
Sevalco Ltd	240,000	2004	chemicals
Anglia Water Services Ltd	190,000	2002	water
Tioxide Europe Ltd	150,000	2000	chemicals
Network Rail Infrastructure Ltd	125,000	2000	other [transport]
Midland Waste Management Ltd	108,000	2002	waste
Eurocare Environmental Services Ltd	100,000	2003	waste
Van Dalen UK Ltd	100,000	2006	waste

Source: Environment Agency 2007

In the Van Dalen prosecution, the recycling firm was fined after it ignored several warnings from the Environment Agency about illegally dismantling refrigerators. Following the case the

Environment Agency said: "This was a deliberate and calculated action by the company. They purposefully flouted the law for profit, releasing chemicals that damaged the ozone layer. The Environment Agency will not tolerate companies that put profit before the environment."

LRD survey highlights employers' failings

During 2007, LRD surveyed union reps to find out from what was happening on the environment in workplaces. Nearly 700 union reps completed the survey and their verdict is a damning indictment of employers' green credentials (see Chapter 2).

The survey found that over three in five employers (61%) have **done nothing** to promote green transport policies, and more than half have been equally inactive on water conservation (57%) and green purchasing (52%). Union reps also reported that a third of employers have done nothing to minimise waste or minimise resource use (both 35%).

Although two-thirds of employers had some kind of recycling in place, only 19% of reps told us they would describe these schemes as comprehensive. Similarly, 63% of employers had undertaken some energy efficiency measures, but only one in nine (11%) could be described as comprehensive. Less than one in ten employers were minimising waste comprehensively and just 6% were minimising resource use comprehensively.

Less than a quarter of reps (23%) reported that their workplace had an environmental management system. And a worrying finding, considering the working environment is a vital part of workplace health and safety, was that over half the reps in the survey said their employer had not provided any **training** on environmental issues. Only 22% said their employer had published information about the organisation's environmental performance.

Although some firms have launched high profile media initiatives, this has not translated into fundamental changes in the workplace. As a rep at rail fastenings firm put it, environmental issues are "seen as **low priority** — no real effort from the company".

The survey findings were particularly disappointing given that these

were all workplaces with union reps who are enthusiastic about protecting the environment and keen to include the issues on the bargaining agenda.

Global climate change

Climate change is probably the greatest environmental threat facing humanity at present.

The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was set up in 1988 to assess climate change. Its reports are the product of scientific consensus and of government policy making, but are a useful source of information on the scale of the problem.

At the time of writing the IPCC is currently finalising its Fourth Assessment Report *Climate Change 2007*, with the full results available in November 2007. Its interim reports show that climate change is a real and growing threat to ecosystems and human societies.

The evidence of climate change

In February 2007, the IPCC published a report on the physical science basis of climate change. The report concludes that "global atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750".

The global atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has increased from a pre-industrial level of 280 parts per million (ppm) to 379 ppm in 2005.

The report argues that "warming of the climate system is unequivocal", based on direct observation. For example:

- **eleven** of the last twelve years (1995-2006) rank among the 12 warmest years in global temperature since 1850; and
- between 1906 and 2005 global average temperature rose by 0.74°C and may have risen by as much as 0.92°C.

The IPCC also predicts that if greenhouse gas emissions continue at current rates, temperatures will rise by at least 1.1°C but may be as much as 6.4°C by 2100.

More information: IPCC, *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis: Summary for Policymakers* www.ipcc.ch/SPM2feb07.pdf

The global consequences of climate change

In April 2007, after considerable controversy, the IPCC published a report on the global consequences of climate change. The report contains some important predictions about the consequences of climate change:

Water

In Africa by 2020, "between 75 million and 250 million people are projected to be exposed to an increase of water stress due to climate change."

Ecosystems

"Approximately 20%-30% of plant and animal species assessed so far are likely to be at increased risk of extinction if increases in global average temperature exceed 1.5°-2.5°C."

Coasts

For small Caribbean and Pacific islands: "Sea-level rise is expected to exacerbate inundation, storm surge, erosion and other coastal hazards, thus threatening vital infrastructure, settlements and facilities that support the livelihood of island communities".

Health

If temperatures rise by 0.5°C or more, there will be an "increased burden from malnutrition, diarrhoeal, cardio-respiratory and infectious diseases" and "increased morbidity and mortality from heat waves, floods and droughts".

The report did not ignore some short-term benefits from warming (such as fewer deaths from cold exposure and increased crop yields), especially in temperate climates like the UK. However, it concluded that, "these benefits will be outweighed by the negative health effects of rising temperatures world-wide, especially in developing countries".

More information: IPCC, *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Summary for Policymakers* www.ipcc.ch/SPM13apr07.pdf

The economic impact of climate change

The *Stern Review*, published in October 2006 by the UK Treasury, warns that the costs of not acting to reduce emissions could lead to "an average 5%-10% loss in global GDP, with poor countries suffering costs in excess of 10% of GDP" over this century. Business as usual could reduce income per head by "between 5% and 20%".

The report states that "the impacts of climate change are not evenly distributed — the poorest countries and people will suffer earliest and most" and warns that at higher temperatures, the additional costs of making new infrastructure and buildings resilient to climate change even in richer countries like the UK could be $15 – $150 billion each year (£7.6 billion – £76 billion).

More information: The *Stern Review*, 2006, www.hm-treasury.gov.uk

The causes of climate change

The IPCC concluded in February 2007 that:

"The global increases in carbon dioxide concentration are due primarily to **fossil fuel use** and land-use change, while those of methane and nitrous oxide are primarily due to agriculture".

Increases in temperature are **"very likely"** due to increased greenhouse gas concentrations resulting from human activity. The sources of greenhouse gas emissions are manifold but often connected to workplaces and work. The *Stern Review* provides a breakdown of global emissions by sector, with 31% attributed to electricity generation, 17% to agriculture (including deforestation), 13% to manufacturing and construction, 4% to industrial processes and 4% to waste.

The role of big corporations

The *Stern Review* describes climate change as "the greatest and widest-ranging market failure ever seen" but it does not directly criticise businesses or challenge the drive for profit.

However, using figures collected by the Carbon Disclosure Project, it is possible to identify some of world's biggest carbon emitting firms. The Korea Electric Power Company reported the highest

emissions in the Project's latest report. The top 20 polluters include oil and gas companies Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell, BP and Total, while Nippon Steel and Alcoa were among the biggest emitters in metals and mining. But with only 360 of the top FT 500 companies reporting their figures, the data does not include some of the largest private or government-owned polluters — for example in China. Only 112 of the 265 largest electric utilities reported their emissions.

The highest emitter in the chemicals sector was the Dow Chemical Company, however Monsanto did not report. Coca Cola was the biggest emitter in the food and beverages sector, although Pepsi did not report. Volkswagen was the largest polluter in the automobile sector.

More information: Carbon Disclosure Project www.cdproject.net/cdp4reports.asp

Another way to identify the responsibility for climate change is to look at emissions from different countries. The top 10 countries account for nearly two-thirds (65%) of all global carbon dioxide emissions (see table below). The G8 most powerful countries account for over 44% of all CO_2 emissions.

Top ten carbon emitting countries

World Carbon Dioxide Emissions from the Consumption and Flaring of Fossil Fuels, 2004

Rank	Total emissions (tonnes)	world %	per capita
1 USA	5,912.21	21.9	20.2
2 China	4,707.28	17.4	3.6
3 Russia	1,684.84	6.2	11.7
4 Japan	1,262.10	4.7	9.9
5 India	1,112.84	4.1	1.1
6 Germany	862.23	3.2	10.5
7 Canada	587.98	2.8	18.1
8 UK	579.68	2.1	9.6
9 South Korea	496.76	1.8	10.3
10 Italy	484.98	1.8	8.4
World	27,043.57	100.00	4.2

Source: US Energy Information Administration International Energy Annual www.eia.doe.gov/pub/international/iealf/tableh1co2.xls

Climate change in the UK

The consequences of climate change for the UK

There are a number of assessments of the likely impact of climate change on the UK. UKCIP, the UK Climate Impacts Centre's worst-case scenario currently predicts that by the 2080s:

- **average annual temperatures** across the UK may rise by between 2°C and 3.5°C and the south east may be up to 5°C warmer in summer;
- **rainfall** may decrease in summer by 50% in the south east and increase in winter by up to 30%; and
- extreme **sea levels**, occurring through combinations of high tides, sea level rise and changes in winds, will be experienced more frequently in many coastal locations.

UKCIP is already working on new climate change models and is due to release the results in 2008.

More information: *Climate Change Scenarios for the United Kingdom: The UKCIP02 Scientific Report*, Mike Hulme and others 2002, www.ukcip.org.uk

Key UK statistics

Provisional figures published in 2007 by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) show that the UK emitted 658 million tonnes of greenhouse gases in 2006, up slightly on the previous two years. But the UK's **carbon emissions** were 560 million tonnes, the highest since 1996 and only just over 5% less than in the base year of 1990.

Government ministers often point out that the UK contributes only around 2% to world emissions. However, a Christian Aid report *Coming clean: Revealing the UK's true carbon footprint* argues that the extensive global reach of UK-based multinationals and financial institutions means that the real contribution is as high as 15%.

Defra also provides figures on UK carbon emissions by source and end user which show where carbon emissions originate and are consumed. The main **source** of carbon emissions in the UK is the energy sector (38%), followed by road transport (22%), manufacturing

and construction (15%) and residential (15%). Commercial activities (4%) and industrial processes (2%) are also significant.

Even by looking at the **end users**, it is clear that at least half of all greenhouse gas emissions come from work-related activities, with a quarter from housing and another quarter from transport — some of this being work-related (see table below).

Estimated emissions of carbon dioxide by end user, 2005

Manufacturing and construction	26%
Road transport	26%
Other transport	2%
Commercial	14%
Residential	27%
Agricultural	1%
Industrial processes	3%

Source: Defra, 2006
www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/globatmos/download/xls/gatb05.xls

Energy

Energy production and consumption are major sources of carbon emissions. For electricity generation, Department for Trade and Industry figures show that coal was the largest provider (37%), followed by gas (33%), nuclear (21%) with renewables accounting for 5%. In terms of carbon emissions, Defra figures show that gas accounts for 42%, petroleum for 31% and coal for 21%.

Transport

Transport is another large source of carbon emissions. Department for Transport figures show that 85% of passenger transport journeys are made in cars, vans and taxis, with only 6% for buses and coaches and 6% by train. Cars make up nearly 13% of total UK carbon emissions, with HGVs accounting for 5% and light vehicles 3%. Rail and buses account for less than 1% each. The **aviation** sector currently accounts for at least 5.5% of UK's CO_2 emissions — but these emissions have extra climate change effects because they take place at altitude.

UK companies and workplaces

The biggest carbon polluters in the UK are found in the energy, steel and oil sectors and include EON, Npower, Corus, EDF Energy and Exxon-Mobil. For individual workplaces, the Drax power station emits the largest quantity of carbon (20.7 million tonnes) and most of the top ten are power stations. (*The Guardian*, 16 May 2006, 3 April 2007)

According to the Carbon Trust, a government-funded body promoting a low-carbon economy, a typical naturally ventilated open-plan **office** creates the equivalent of 79kg of carbon dioxide per square metre every year, while a typical air-conditioned office creates 151 kg. It estimates that with energy efficiency measures, these figures can be cut by over a third.

The TUC points out that more than half the UK's energy is directly used in the workplace, including 80% of the UK's lighting energy.

Individuals

Despite the pitfalls of attributing environmental problems to individuals, some figures can be used to highlight important issues.

In his book *How to live a low-carbon life*, Chris Goodall estimates that an average individual produces about 12.5 tonnes of CO_2 per person — about half at home and the other half through work. However, individuals who live in large houses, drive large cars and fly a lot will have a much higher figure. As Goodall puts it: "The richest people are the worst offenders". He also points out that individual workers could save 0.8 tonnes of CO_2 a year by working from home.

2. Workplace action to protect the environment

Workers and the environment

Research has consistently shown that workers are interested in protecting the environment. A TUC survey in 2002 found that 94% of workers supported environmental measures at work such as recycling, cutting waste and water conservation. Almost four out of five (79%) disagreed with the statement that "there is nothing much I can do to improve the environment."

Earlier this year a poll for the Carbon Trust, revealed that more than two thirds (67%) of workers were keen to help their organisation cut carbon emissions and wanted to know more about how to do it. However, less than a fifth of workers (18%) were happy with what their company was doing to cut emissions.

The LRD survey

During 2007, the Labour Research Department (LRD) surveyed union reps to assess what is going on in workplaces to protect the environment. Nearly 700 trade unionists responded.

The survey indicated widespread enthusiasm among trade union reps for taking action on the environment, with many offering practical examples of their achievements in negotiating improvements at work. Some of these are detailed below and can be adopted in other workplaces.

Energy efficiency

Many workplaces operate some energy saving measures. A Prospect safety rep at SP PowerSystems Ltd said his workplace had signs reminding people to switch off lights and equipment. Another Prospect rep reported that the manufacturing shops at BAe Systems have **light sensors** that switch off when there is sufficient natural light available.

A UCU rep at the North East Institute said his workplace had a computer controlled central heating system and other practices included using **low energy light bulbs**, lights and plug points

switched off at lunch and at the end of work, and improved building insulation.

A small number of workplaces had more ambitious plans. A T&G (now Unite) rep at the Port of Tilbury and a UNISON rep at the University of Lincoln both told LRD that their employers had agreed to install **wind turbines** to generate their own renewable energy. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council is also looking to supplying part of its energy need by renewable sources.

A radical way to cut energy use is to reduce the working week. A GMB rep at BAe Systems has negotiated a **four-day week** (less overtime) so the factory uses less energy. Another example involved linking of **bonuses** to environmental improvements. A T&G (now Unite) rep at manufacturing firm PPG Industries said the union had agreed productivity related bonus payments linked to recycling, energy saving and emissions reductions. PCS reps at the Higher Education Funding Council for England monitor carbon dioxide emissions to help reduce the organisation's carbon footprint.

LRD survey profile

Many union reps told LRD about the integrated environmental work going on in their workplaces. Some reps had achieved a great deal in many areas.

LRD received 677 responses from union reps (56%), safety reps (34%) and other learning and equality reps (8%). Just over 1% defined themselves solely as environment reps.

Of the responses, three-quarters (72%) came from reps in the public sector — with those in central government alone accounting for over a quarter (27%). Nearly half (49%) of the respondents worked in offices.

The largest responses came from the PCS public and commercial services union (25%), Prospect professionals' union (22%), the UCU lecturers' union (14%), the CWU communication workers' union (12%) and the T&G general union (8%).

Waste and recycling

The most common example of workplace environmental action reps gave in our survey was **recycling**. At a minimum level, this involved recycling white paper. In some cases provision is made for colour paper. In others, **recycled paper** is used for photocopying. A UCU rep reported that in some offices at Aberdeen University, there are no waste paper bins so that all paper is recycled.

In other cases, printing is discouraged. A PCS rep at the British Council said that e-mails now contain footers asking, "Do you really need to print this e-mail?"

Some workplaces were more ambitious with their recycling, for example by including IT equipment. A UCU rep at University College London (UCL) described recycling in her workplace:

"Some wastes are sent for re-use. Toner cartridges may be sent for re-manufacture and some furniture may be accepted for re-use by Procurement Services. Computers are donated to Computer Aid International for refurbishment and shipment to developing countries and gas cylinders may be refilled by BOC. Some companies operate a take-back system of packaging or of catalogues, but this is a local arrangement. UCL provides direct recycling streams for paper and for bottle glass, although the potential for other streams is constantly under review. Other waste streams are subject to increasing levels of pre-disposal conditioning by the waste disposal contractor. Batteries are removed from the hazardous waste stream and sent for recycling and fluorescent tubes are processed to recycle the mercury content. Similarly, the shreddings from confidential waste are sent for paper recycling and the domestic waste is sorted to remove metal and other recoverables."

Reps also reported successes in **recycling other waste**. A Prospect safety rep at Magnox Electric said that his firm had reduced waste going to landfill by 60% through recycling. A Community rep at shoe manufacturers Loake Brothers reported that plastics and water-based adhesives were being recycled. An Amicus (now Unite) rep at Kemfine UK told LRD that metal for scrap as well as paper and cardboard is collected.

A T&G (now Unite) safety rep at GlaxoSmithKline said their recycling included: "1) Metals graded and reused, rest is sold for scrap. 2) Used solvents recovered via distillation process. 3) Exact packaging quantities dispensed for use. 4) Waste solvent burned in own boiler system to create steam for site heating and hot water. 5) Paper and plastics sent to recycleable manufacturer."

Water and toilets

Better use of water was also reported by some reps. For example, a UCU rep at Thames Valley University told LRD that the water coolers were now linked to **mains water**.

Toilets also use huge quantities of water. A Prospect rep at the Met Office said his workplace used **rainwater** to flush the toilets, while another Prospect safety rep said there were **"water miser controls"** on toilets in his workplace. In other cases, reps reported on the installation of toilets that use little or no water at all.

Ethical purchasing

The Community union's internal environment policy covers facilities management, office services, printing, publishing and procurement. Its provisions address the issues of:

- conserving energy, water, paper and other resources;
- reusing and recycling (paper, plastics, batteries etc);
- monitoring discharges and emissions to air, land and water;
- ensuring that suppliers and contractors use environmentally friendly goods and practices;
- ensuring proper health, safety and environment standards for staff;
- maintaining grounds with good husbandry; and
- providing fairly traded food products in staff facilities.

The union also encourages staff to reduce car use, through a car-sharing plan, interest-free loans for bus and rail season tickets, information on local bus and train services, and the promotion of walking and cycling, with changing and shower facilities at work.

Transport

Work-related transport is another area where carbon emissions could be reduced. **Cycling** offers a cheap and effective alternative. A PCS rep in the Pensions Service told LRD that in her workplace: "We have actively sought management to install an additional bike shed so members can ride to work and carried out a survey and arranged for management to install a shower for the same purpose". Other workplaces have arranged **loans** for bike purchases and introduced better facilities and security to encourage cycle use (see box).

Cycle policies at the University of Brighton

The public services union UNISON branch environment officer at the University of Brighton explained the measures the union has negotiated to promote cycle use. There is **secure cycle storage** on all four work sites, including bike cages with stands and covers, with a common key across the sites to padlock the gates. The union has negotiated an **interest-free cycle loan**, including for a lock and helmet. It has plans for getting decent lockers and other facilities on work sites.

Car use is also being tackled in some workplaces. A PCS rep told LRD that new pool cars at the Government Office for the South East are **dual fuel** and that public transport usage has increased. A Prospect rep at the Natural Environment Research Council said his workplace used dual fuel and **hybrid cars** in the transport pool, and another Prospect rep reported that a **car sharing scheme** is in place at the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. Video conferencing has been set up and two electric vans bought for on site use.

A T&G (now Unite) safety rep at Millennium Chemicals reported that a company bus is provided for day and shift workers.

The role of union reps

The LRD survey found that a variety of union reps take up environmental issues, with lines of responsibility not always clearly defined. A CWU rep at Royal Mail summed up the ambiguity, writing that, "environmental issues are sometimes left to other people".

Some reps took the issues up as part of their wider role as a branch secretary or workplace union rep. Others took it on in their capacity as a health and safety rep. And a T&G (now Unite) steward at the Scottish and Newcastle Brewery said that union learning reps was their preferred route.

Other reps have used **joint committees**. A UNISON rep in Telford and Wrekin council told LRD that the council had just set up a climate change working group and had agreed to negotiate on measures when the council moves offices shortly. A T&G (now Unite) rep at BAe systems said that he represented the union on a company environmental review committee. UNISON and UCU reps at City College in Manchester set up a joint trade union environment group, with an e-mail discussion tree and a list of priorities. These unions have asked management to set up a joint environmental working party with unions represented.

Some reps indicated that the health and safety committee was the usual place where environmental issues were discussed with management. A Prospect safety rep at Sellafield nuclear plant said: "we have an agreement that safety work can include environmental", while another Prospect rep at the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority said: "safety and the environment go together".

Some reps have found existing management systems useful. A T&G (now Unite) rep at Argos and a UNISON rep at the National Grid both said that they had used the **management standard ISO 14001** to negotiate improvements in their organisations. A UNISON rep at Lewes district council reported that the council had been accredited for eight years under the **European Union's Eco-Management and Auditing System (EMAS)**.

Whatever their status, reps fulfil an essential role getting environmental issues tackled at the workplace. A Prospect rep at the National Library of Scotland said he had carried out a staff survey and helped to organise a "green day" as part of the "Learning at Work" week. A UCU rep at City of Sunderland College organised a "Unions and the environment" day conference in December 2006.

Some reps are using innovative methods to get the message across. A rep at EDF Energy told LRD she had shown former US vice president Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* to explain the case for action on climate change in her workplace.

A CWU rep at Royal Mail has used **health and safety risk assessments** as a means of raising environmental issues and a T&G (now Unite) rep at the North West Institute of Further and Higher Education in Northern Ireland told LRD that the union had been involved in an environmental audit of waste products and their disposal.

A PCS rep at Revenue and Customs said that reps had served a safety Union Improvement Notice on her building in 2002 for poor heating and air quality — a similar scheme could be developed to tackle environmental concerns in the workplace.

Problems encountered by union reps

Many union reps highlighted problems in raising environment issues with employers. A PCS rep reported that the Department for Work and Pensions' idea of minimising resources was "to cut staff" and a Prospect rep at EDF energy said: "A policy of relocating staff and reducing business mileage is not environmentally friendly as it increases private mileage."

Very few reps said that their employer offered financial help with public transport, for example by buying or loaning funds for season tickets. A Prospect rep told LRD that at his firm "the reality is that more people travel to offices a long way from where they live than ever before due to reorganisations". A UCU rep at Hopwood Hall College made the following comment: "Discussions about how staff commute between sites — going nowhere fast".

Cost was seen as the biggest barrier to recycling. A CWU rep at Royal Mail said that his sorting office introduced it for about 12 months until management "found out they would have to pay extra to have it collected!" Similarly, a PCS rep at the Maritime Coastguard Agency told us his workplace was awaiting a paper recycling facility, because the local council has refused to collect from small business without payment.

3. Tools for union reps

Individual unions have published some useful tools to help reps take up environmental issues in their workplaces. The TUC has produced two guides for union reps on the environment, both called *Greening in the workplace* and published in 1991 and 2005.

The TUC has highlighted five stages for devising a green strategy at work:

Step 1: Establish the **state of play**, key concerns, levels of awareness/ interest, union policies and agreements, role of environment rep, relations with local green campaigns and management attitudes.

Step 2: Identify specific issues and draw up an **action plan**: priorities, resources and responsibilities.

Step 3: Preliminary **approach to management**: common concerns, scope for joint environment policy, green audits and other forms of joint work and discussion with unions.

Step 4: Get a **green agreement**, with clear objectives and procedures, consultation, facilities and time off for training.

Step 5: Follow up: communicate the agreement to members, promote active involvement, use it for recruitment, and promote further awareness and review.

Below are selected tools that reps can adapt to tackle environmental issues in their workplace.

Model agreements

Framework agreement on the environment

Some unions have sought to negotiate "sustainable workplaces framework agreements", which overlap with corporate social responsibility and other policies. The TUC says that where possible, a sustainable workplaces framework agreement should include:

- the union's and employer's commitment to improving environmental performance;
- principles of employee participation and co-operation;
- the framework of a joint sustainable workplace policy, and specific issues it will cover, such as energy sourcing, energy efficiency, resource and waste management;
- mutual responsibilities and joint procedures for dealing with issues;
- clear objectives and agreement on how they will be regularly monitored and assessed; and
- integrating sustainability objectives with the employer's statutory health and safety policy, and with its risk assessment process.

More information: TUC, 2005, *Greening the workplace* www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-9996-f0.pdf

Joint environment policies

A joint environment policy should contain:

- an environmental mission statement (see below);
- procedures for managing environmental issues; and
- interfaces with other policies, for example on health and safety, working hours, flexible working.

The CWU communications union says that a policy should include participation in environmental management schemes such as ISO 14001 and EMAS (EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme). It also believes that any policy should regard any environmental standards required by law as the minimum standards and whenever possible pursue higher standards.

Environmental policies will need to be reviewed and updated regularly in the light of new concerns. The issue of climate change can be integrated into an existing environmental policy and a new policy can incorporate the employer's commitment to cut carbon emissions.

Environmental mission statement

The TUC says: "A purposeful mission statement should seek to spell out the challenges facing the organisation, highlight key issues and outline the main procedures". The statement should be jointly agreed, warning that management can hardly expect workers to be supportive if they've had no say in drawing it up.

A typical mission statement should include:

- co-operation and consultation between workers, their trade union

representatives and management;

- dialogue with local, national and European Union authorities and other trade unions;
- minimise pollution and waste from all activities;
- the use of products and processes that have the least possible impact on the environment;
- improve health and safety and the working environment;
- evaluate the environmental impact of all activities, practices and services;
- wise use of energy and improved energy efficiency;
- achieve sustainable use of natural resources and maximise use of renewable and recyclable materials;
- work with third parties (suppliers, contractors, customers, etc) to minimise environmental impact;
- publicise information on environmental policy and performance and promote good community relations ;
- include environmental considerations in investment and planning decisions;
- exceed where possible regulatory and legislative requirements by developing exacting in-house standards; and
- regular environmental audit or review of all activities.

More information: TUC, 1991, *Greening the workplace*

Model environmental management policy

This policy is adapted from the National Blood Service policy adopted in 2004, which was drawn up in consultation with unions.

Purpose

To ensure that all tasks and processes that pose an environmental risk are managed to minimise any negative impact on the environment.

Process description

The [organisation] acknowledges that the effect of its operations on the environment is of significant importance and that it has a role in reducing the impact caused by its activities.

The [organisation] is committed to meeting legislative and regulatory requirements and the continuous improvements of its environmental performance, whilst encouraging its suppliers, contractors and sub-contractors to reduce environmental impact.

Whilst [the organisation] recognises that the minimum acceptable level of environmental performance is that laid down by statute, it will regularly review its environmental management systems with the objective of devising and implementing management plans that will deliver progressive improvements in its environmental performance.

The [name parties] shall be responsible for the development, implementation and review of this policy.

In particular the [organisation] will seek to:

- ensure that Board level responsibility for environmental management is clearly defined;
- undertake an environmental review and establish a register of significant environmental risks;
- develop and agree an range of environmental targets and objectives;
- promote the efficient use of energy in an economically and environmentally sound manner by promoting energy conservation, and where economically viable, invest in energy saving technology and management ;
- have due regard to environmental issues and value for money in all centrally purchased goods and services and promote the use of products and services of suppliers whose environmental policies are in accordance with its own;
- promote visual amenity through the design, location and finishes of buildings and structures;
- ensure that all staff are aware of the environment policy and how they can contribute to [the organisation's] overall environmental performance, through the provision of appropriate training;
- promote waste minimisation and reduce the environmental impact of waste through safe disposal;
- protect natural habitats; and
- reduce pollution to air, land and water wherever practicable.

Delivery of this policy will be achieved through the development, implementation and review of a written Environmental Management System.

The [organisation] will openly communicate its environmental performance to staff, customers, government authorities and other stakeholders and interested parties on request.

Green travel policies

The Department for Transport (DfT) and other organisations have supported green travel policies or plans for many years. Government guidance is clear that the involvement of trade unionists is crucial

for ensuring that the plans are workable and fair. The DfT guidance says:

"Travel plans affect the way that organisations go about their business, as well as the travel behaviour of employees. They can also have an impact on employees' conditions of service, affecting issues such as allowances, benefits, workplace parking and recruitment and relocation packages, which are key concerns of human resources and trades union officials.

"Travel plans can take organisations into new areas of activity and open up new ways of thinking. For travel plans to succeed, **staff liaison** is vital: staff need to be consulted and be encouraged to take 'ownership' of any new arrangements. Human resources staff and trades union representatives have particular skills and expertise in dealing with staff, which can contribute greatly to the successful implementation of a travel plan."

UNISON public services union in the south west of England carried out a review of green travel plans that aim to protect the environment. The review found that the best examples addressed problems faced by union members in travelling to work, such as:

- lost time — absorbed in traffic jams, where no other activity can be pursued;
- costs — especially for low paid workers;
- safety — on roads; using/waiting for public transport; and walking;
- stress — induced by congestion, mechanical failures, poor driving conditions etc; and
- health impacts — from emissions and from inadequate physical exercise.

Green travel plans tend to focus on reducing the number of single-occupant car journeys to work. However, best practice examples can be tailored to address the characteristics and needs of the workforce and address all types of travel associated with an employer's activities, not just journeys to and from work.

UNISON found that a good travel plan should encompass some potentially popular alternative working practices (such as teleworking

and nine day fortnights) that reduce the need to travel to work and provide material incentives (such as allowances, grants, loans and extra holidays) to switch from driving to other modes of transport.

Key measures

The following measures were implemented at Salisbury District Council with the involvement of UNISON reps:

- pool bicycles provided;
- bicycle parking facilities;
- showers and changing facilities;
- cycle mileage (35.8p) on use of own bicycles;
- £25 voucher available for bicycle equipment after cycling 25 miles on business;
- interest free loans up to £1,000 for purchase of bicycle or electric bike recovered through payroll;
- interest free annual travel season ticket loans recovered through payroll;
- free Park and Ride permits for new employees living over two miles from the council offices;
- where there is no suitable Park and Ride, city centre permits to be issued to new staff on an interim basis until a suitable Park and Ride site is available;
- travel vouchers to the same value as Park and Ride permit as alternative option;
- existing staff can change permits for travel vouchers or Park and Ride permits as suitable sites open;
- buyout of parking permits at £965 (net of standard rate tax);
- optional essential user status buyout at £1,218 (net of standard rate tax) (Note: essential users over 1,500 miles per year). Casual mileage rate higher than essential rate;
- essential users can opt for both buyouts (amounting to £2,183); and
- a voluntary home working policy is being developed.

UNISON is planning to produce new, updated guidance on green travel plans.

More information: DfT, 2004, *The role of human resources staff and trades union representatives in supporting travel plans* www.dft.gov.uk, UNISON, 2002, *Bargaining for better green travel*

Eco-auditing

The TUC says that environmental or "green" auditing is at the heart of a joint environment policy and green agreement. It says: "The distinguishing feature of a **green audit** is that it presents information to assess risk to the working and living environments and landscape".

The International Chamber of Commerce says these audits comprise, "a systematic documented periodic and objective evaluation of how well environmental organisation, management and equipment are performing with the aim of helping to safeguard the environment".

The TUC says a superficial one-off review of environmental performance would not classify as an audit. Nor would an environmental impact assessment, though it would contribute to the process.

Audits can take place across the whole organisation or at individual sites. The basic steps are:

- select management-union audit team and identify sites;
- establish audit parameters;
- inform national, regional and site management and unions of time scale for auditing;
- on-site audit commences: several visits;
- off-site research;
- draft environmental audit report with numbered list of recommendations;
- discuss draft with site and regional management and unions – modify where necessary;
- final draft;
- management response; acceptance/rejection of recommendations; adopting of timescale;
- implementation of recommendations;
- closure of the audit once all the recommendations have been implemented or rejected;
- final report to national management and unions;
- communication of the report throughout the organisation;
- publicity for the report; and
- set a date for the next audit.

A T&G (now Unite) general union guide on eco-auditing says the process should investigate how each work activity affects the environment and how the effect is assessed, controlled, monitored and reduced.

Specific priorities should include:

- product planning — design, packaging, use and re-use, lifespan and disposal;
- selection and use of raw materials — are they used efficiently, are there more environmentally friendly alternatives?
- production processes — could they be safer, healthier and more environmentally sound?
- safe storage — of product and raw materials, especially chemicals;
- transportation — the use of safe and environmentally conscious transport of raw materials, chemicals, components;
- reduction and elimination of emissions and other nuisances — not just toxic and harmful emissions, but also smells, noise, impact on the landscape;
- accident prevention and procedures in the event of an emergency; and
- training requirements and information needed by workers.

One way that eco-audits have been developed recently is to carry out an environmental risk assessment, using the same methodology found in health and safety risk assessments. Advice organisation Envirowise's pack for trade unionists contains an example. An audit of office areas can be conducted using Friends of the Earth (FoE) Scotland's online audit form.

More information: Envirowise, 2005, Environmental education for trade unionists, T&G, 1996, *Trade unionists and eco-auditing*, FoE, 2003, *Greening the office: online audit*, www.green-office.org.uk

Environment checklist

	Yes	No
Climate change		
Are greenhouse gas emissions measured?	❒	❒
Are emissions published?	❒	❒
Are there targets to reduce emissions?	❒	❒
Energy efficiency		
Is energy use assessed by type and end use?	❒	❒
Is there an energy management system in place?	❒	❒
Does the organisation have a policy on renewables?	❒	❒
Are buildings, processes and appliances as energy efficient as possible?	❒	❒
Could combined system be used?	❒	❒
Could energy be conserved by better housekeeping (e.g. lighting, standby, insulation)?	❒	❒
Is energy conservation incorporated into building and refurbishment plans?	❒	❒
Has the impact on workplace temperature and ventilation been considered?	❒	❒
Is energy awareness training provided?	❒	❒
Facilities		
Are the environmental conditions in buildings checked regularly?	❒	❒
Are temperatures checked and controlled?	❒	❒
Have noise risk assessments been carried out?	❒	❒
Are hazardous substances used in the workplace?	❒	❒
Does the organisation have an ethical environmental purchasing policy?	❒	❒
Transport		
Can the environmental performance of vehicles be improved?	❒	❒
Are environmental considerations included when new vehicles are purchased?	❒	❒
Is there a car sharing policy?	❒	❒
Is there a car parking policy?		
Is there an air travel policy?	❒	❒
Are there incentives for management and workers to use public transport?	❒	❒
Are there facilities for cyclists?	❒	❒

	Yes	No
Waste management		
Is your employer aware of recent and forthcoming legislation and regulations on waste?	❒	❒
Does your employer have a waste management strategy?	❒	❒
Have they carried out a waste audit?	❒	❒
Is there a competent person in charge of waste management?	❒	❒
Has the employer looked at minimising waste at source?	❒	❒
Have they considered altering operating practices and processes?	❒	❒
Can alternatives to toxic materials be used?	❒	❒
Does waste management comply with health and safety regulations e.g. COSHH?	❒	❒
Does your employer provide information to the public on waste management?	❒	❒
Recycling		
Does the employer have a recycling policy?	❒	❒
Can waste be separated into recyclable and non-recyclable materials?	❒	❒
Is all office paper reused or recycled?	❒	❒
Can other substances be recycled?	❒	❒

4. Trade union policies and the environment

Unions and the environment

Most environmental concerns, including a significant proportion of carbon emissions, originate from workplaces or from work-related activities such as travel — putting unions on the frontline of environmental action.

Trade union history is littered with examples of struggles around environmental issues. For example, the TUC's general council considered a resolution submitted by the USDAW shopworkers' union in 1957, which "urged the speedy conversion of all industrial boilers, furnaces and locomotives to prevent the poisoning of the atmosphere".

The TUC congress in 1970 carried a motion that noted "with deep concern the ever-increasing pollution on this planet and its effects on the environment and life". The mover argued: "Pollution does not just happen; it is created by every one of us in some way or another when going about our daily work. It is created to a large extent by industry, where very often profit is the motive in preference to safety, health or welfare."

In 1972, the TUC held a conference on **Workers' and the environment**, attended by delegates from 35 trade unions where pollution and even climate change were discussed. The Conservation Society warned the conference that, "carbon dioxide and burning of fossil fuels changes the composition of the atmosphere and raises the possibility of changing global temperature".

In 1990, TUC congress passed a motion on the environment and global warming, which fully recognised "the enormous threat to the people of the world from the effects of 'global warming'" and called for "steep cuts in emissions from carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases".

John Edmonds, who was at that time the general secretary of the GMB, called global warming "the most serious hazard" which "threatens the whole planet". He argued that "every workplace should undertake a regular audit of its impact on the environment"

Union action on environmental issues

Union direct action has also been taken to protect workers and the environment.

The T&G, ASTMS and FBU unions were instrumental in effectively banning the pesticide 2,4,5-T (known as Agent Orange) in the UK in the 1980s.

Shop stewards at Lucas aerospace developed alternative corporate plans for the manufacturer, including fuel cells, a hybrid car and a road-rail vehicle for integrated public transport.

Transport unions T&G, NUS, the NUR and ASLEF took action to stop the dumping of nuclear waste at sea in 1983.

British dockers refused to discharge toxic waste from Canada on 8-9 August 1989, receiving support from the following TUC Congress.

Hundreds of stoppages have taken place over asbestos. For example CWU postal workers prevented exposure in 2004 after waste bags were delivered to a distribution centre.

Similarly, workers have taken action over workplace temperatures. In 2003, UNISON members at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary — built under the private finance initiative and open for only 18 months at that stage — walked out after temperatures reached 35°C.

and that unions should develop **"green shop stewards"**.

In 1998, the **Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC)** was established by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) as the main forum for consultation between government and trade unions on environmental issues.

The TUC organised a special conference in 1998 on **sustainable development** and the following year at congress, the ISTC (now Community union) urged the government, "to improve the quality of life for this and future generations, to tackle the environmental

threat that climate change poses and to promote a strategy of sustainable development".

Unions and climate change

Recent energy and transport resolutions at TUC congress have had a strong environmental component. In 2005, a motion on energy and climate change was carried, which reiterated support for targeted reductions in carbon emissions. The 2006 congress included a session on climate change with environment minister David Miliband.

The TUC supports the call for binding carbon targets in CO_2 emissions and has made proposals on how to reduce them.

Energy

On energy generation, the TUC strongly supports **renewables**. The 2006 congress called on the government: "To promote the use of renewable resources such as solar, wind and water power in combination with other initiatives such as clean coal technology, which is addressing the problems of coal's excessive production of carbon dioxide".

The TUC has also welcomed the development of **clean coal technology** and carbon capture and storage. In April 2007, the NUM mineworkers' union and the TUC held a conference to promote these technologies, attended by over 100 delegates.

Recent TUC congresses have also supported nuclear power as part of a balanced energy policy. Unions with members in the nuclear industry, such as Amicus and the T&G (now Unite), Prospect and the GMB have argued strongly for the continuation of nuclear power as part of the strategy to cut carbon emissions.

Other unions, including UNISON and the PCS public services unions have opposed the extension of nuclear power on safety and environmental grounds and have called for its phasing out.

Transport

There is substantial agreement among unions that much can be done in the area of transport to reduce carbon emissions. For many years the TUC has supported an **integrated transport policy** and public ownership and control of the national railway system. Unions want

TUC Greenworkplaces Project

During 2006, the TUC organised six pilot projects to increase union involvement in environmental activism. The workplaces involved were the British Museum, the TUC, Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in York, Friends Provident financial organisation, Scottish Power and Corus steel park in Birmingham.

The PCS civil service union at the British Museum helped get 200 staff to an environment open day. Over 80 members have been identified as environment reps, with the first 20 beginning training this year. The union plans to carry out an environmental audit with a view to reducing the museum's carbon footprint of 8,000 tonnes a year.

For more information on the Greenworkplaces project, call Caroline Malloy at the TUC on 020 7467 1332.

the electrification of the entire rail network and the promotion of light railways and trams as a means of providing an ecologically-friendly alternative to road use.

Unions also want the government to encourage the transfer of freight from road to rail and have supported **green travel plans** such as car sharing, more cycling, travel pass loans and other methods of encouraging the use of public transport. The TUC has welcomed some forms of road pricing to tackle rising CO_2 emissions from transport — for example, the London congestion charge that began in 2003 and the Eddington report on congestion published in December 2006.

Trade union representatives are seen to be the key to environmental improvements in the workplace. The TUC supports the creation of **environmental reps**, with the same kind of powers and rights to time off, facilities and training as safety reps, and who can negotiate environmental agreements with their employers. In a recent government review of facilities for union reps the TUC argued that the ACAS Code of Practice could be changed to create these reps.

In addition, unions have included the environment in accredited

courses — for example, there is a environment unit on the TUC Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety course. More recently, separate environment courses have been run by TUC tutors and by individual unions, with a positive take up from reps. And the TUC has created successful pilot schemes in its Greenworkplaces Project (see page 33).

Unions are also highlighting other environment-related issues. For example, Prospect has highlighted **job cuts** that are affecting scientists studying climate change. And unions generally have emphasised the effects of long working hours, long-distance travel and fuel poverty, which effect the environment.

TUSDAC encourages affiliates to ensure that the Emissions Trading Scheme is on the workplace bargaining agenda. At the same time some trade unionists are conscious of the limits of market mechanisms such as "green" taxes to bring about the step change needed on carbon emissions.

Prospect general secretary, Paul Noon, expressed this concern at the TUC's 2006 congress. He said:

"I think there are problems because of the limits of the market in dealing with these issues. Left to its own devices the market will take a short-term view based upon the highest level of reward and not necessarily a longer-term environmental view. It is how the government intervenes and regulates the market where we believe more needs to be done."

The effect on jobs

Trade unions are increasingly looking at employment potential of new technologies and industries associated with a low-carbon economy.

The government's climate change review in 2005 revealed that 400,000 people work in environmental jobs, with firms having an annual turnover exceeding £25 billion. TUSDAC figures suggest there may be around 690,000 jobs in the "environment economy", much of it well distributed regionally and it points to the situation in Germany, where around 1.5 million people work in environmental technology industries and to the Danish wind industry, which has

International union action

The ITUC global union federation wants governments: "To legislate new statutory rights that are prerequisites to full participation, i.e. time off and training to carry out duties for environmental representatives, revision of employment rights regulations to formally recognise environmental duties and provide for paid release, among others".

Unions across the globe have negotiated important agreements to tackle carbon emissions and protect the environment.

In Germany, the main union confederation the DGB and German unions have negotiated an "Alliance for Work and Environment" with government, environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and employers to **modernise old buildings**.

The programme will renovate 300,000 apartments, create 200,000 jobs, reduce two million tonnes of CO_2 emissions and lower heating bills for tenants, by improving the insulation of buildings, using advanced heating technologies and renewable energy. The German government is funding the project, spending around £4 billion over five years, as well as making a similar sum available through credits at favourable rates of interest for energy efficiency schemes.

In Spain, the CCOO and UGT union federations signed a tripartite Climate Change Plan in 2005 for joint oversight of national compliance to the Kyoto Protocol. Spanish unions are also campaigning through 170 Works Councils and local authorities to cut carbon emissions.

In Italy, the three trade union confederations CGIL, CISL and UIL have proposed introducing a **"transport voucher"**, similar to a lunch voucher, to get employers to contribute towards workers' transport costs. The vouchers could be used on all types of public transport, including taxis.

created over 20,000 jobs in the energy sector.

TUSDAC has highlighted the jobs potential of "future industries" sectors including:

- renewable energy — 45,000 jobs from wind-related technologies;
- energy efficiency — from the development, manufacture, installation and servicing of environmental monitoring and control systems, combined heat and power systems, and fuel-efficient vehicles; and
- recycling — with potentially 40,000 to 78,000 jobs, re-manufacture (50,000 jobs), "green chemistry" and other environmentally friendly industries.

More information: ITUC, *Trade Union climate change strategies*, www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpP_8Bh.EN.pdf, ETUC, 2004, *Climate change: avenues for trade union action*, www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/GuideKyoto-Text-ENG.pdf

The case for legal rights for environment reps

As far back as 1990, the TUC's Environmental Action Group proposed legal environmental rights for union reps. The TUC general council report in that year argued that these rights should build on the existing rights under health and safety law, including the right to: inspect the workplace; investigate accidents, incidents and complaints; information and consultation; initiate and participate in environmental audits; paid time off for facilities and training without loss of earnings and to set up joint consultative committees.

However, there has been little progress on the issue until recently.

The current situation

At present many trade union reps, including workplace convenors and stewards, health and safety reps and learning reps, use their existing legal rights to take up environmental issues with their employers.

However, some reps have reported attempts by their employers to obstruct this work by narrowly interpreting regulations and guidance on trade union activities. Many of these existing reps have a heavy workload of union responsibilities already and want to bring new people into activity with a clearly defined environmental role.

However, existing law and guidance makes that difficult.

In the ACAS Code of Practice on *Time off for trade union duties and activities*, neither the entitlements in *sections 7* to *10* nor the examples of trade union duties in *section 11* reflect environmental issues or climate change. At present, the Code allows for consultations on "the working environment", which means health and safety at work, and does not mention other environmental issues. The Code has not been revised since 2003 and much of the original 1978 text remains unchanged.

Department for Trade and Industry review

During 2007, the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) carried out a review of **facilities and facility time** for workplace representatives which acknowledged the difficulties union reps face in taking up environmental issues. It states:

"Some employers may be very resistant to any training for union representatives which is not covered by the statutory entitlements. In this respect, trade unions point to the difficulties which shop stewards or dedicated environment representatives face when seeking to attend union courses about the environment or greening the workplace."

The LRD survey

The Labour Research Department (LRD) survey underlined these concerns. It found that union involvement in "green" issues was still quite limited, even in workplaces where individual reps were enthusiastic. Many reps reported that they had tried to use existing arrangements to take up issues, while others said no formal agreement was in place. Key findings from the survey of nearly 700 reps include:

- only 31% of respondents said the union had been involved in environmental improvement measures in their workplace;
- 19% said environmental issues were part of the bargaining agenda in their workplace — with 54% sure that they were not;
- only 15% said there was a joint management/union agreement on environmental issues in their workplace;
- only 10% of workplaces with an environmental management system

had unions involved in it;

- 26% reported getting time off for training and duties regarding the environment;
- 10% said they had attended training on environmental issues; and
- 2% had problems getting time off for training.

What do unions want?

The TUC submitted its case for legal rights for environment reps to the DTI review and continues to press the case with government. The submission argued that environment reps should be able to participate in climate change education, training and employee engagement activities consistent with *Article 6* of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

TUC deputy general secretary Frances O'Grady has outlined the specific changes needed:

"There is a clear case for statutory provisions to give environmental reps a right to paid time off to carry out their duties and to attend trade union training. The ACAS Code of Practice should be amended to recognise the role of unions in formal consultations with the employer on "sustainable production and consumption. This would give union reps and members a voice at work on energy efficiency, recycling, green travel plans and sourcing renewable energy — and then to use cost savings to create better jobs and greener ways to work"

The TUC wants environment reps to get a minimum ten days of accredited training in the 12 months immediately following their election/appointment. Reps would have the right to reasonable paid time off to carry out their functions and to get information from their employer to assist with these duties. Employers would be required to grant facilities such as room space, phone and computer use to enable environment reps to fulfil these duties.

TUC national organiser Paul Nowak told LRD that there are three good reasons why the government should give union environment reps the statutory right to time off, facilities and training:

- firstly, union representatives have the proven capability to affect **progressive change** at work — for example in the realm of health and safety, but also in areas like learning. "If the government is serious about tackling climate change, then give union reps the tools to do the job";
- secondly, as a matter of **public policy**, union environment reps are an excellent way to engage workers in the debates around climate change; and
- thirdly, such rights would help unions to **recruit** the next generation of representatives in the same way that issues around union learning has brought new representatives into the union movement.

5. Strategies to protect the environment

Protecting the environment cannot by done workplace by workplace. It requires international and national policies to be effective. This chapter looks at current government measures together with proposals made by environmental campaigners.

Government policy

The government has a range of policy instruments for protecting the environment, including laws and regulations, taxation and targets.

Environment law

According to the Environment Agency, at the beginning of 2007 there were 751 environment laws in the UK.

Some of these laws originate from particular problems in the UK, such as the *Clean Air Acts* and *Public Health Acts*. Others come from European Union (EU) Directives on the environment and on workplace health and safety.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

The *Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA)* laid the foundations for dealing with environmental crime in the UK. It requires measures that most benefit or least damage the environment as a whole, and at acceptable cost.

The Act also establishes a "duty of care" on all those in the waste industry chain. Although the Act contains no specific provisions for unions, union reps have the same rights as any other person to inspect pollution control registers held by enforcing authorities.

Environment Act 1995

The *Environment Act 1995* established the Environment Agency and Scottish Environment Protection Agency, bringing together all the relevant enforcement bodies.

Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999

The *Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999* implemented the EU's Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Directive. The legislation deals with issues such as energy efficiency, vibration, waste minimisation and noise.

The Act introduced a system for managing the environmental impact of pollution, known as BAT (Best Available Techniques). These are technologies, designs and operational procedures which will prevent, or where that is not practicable, reduce pollution to land, air and water.

More information: Envirowise, 2005, *Environmental education for trade unionists*, the Environment Agency's NetRegs website provides free guidance on environmental law, www.netregs.gov.uk

Health and safety law

Some aspects of the environment overlap with health and safety law in the UK. The *Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA)* aimed to ensure the protection of workers within one comprehensive, integrated system of law. It imposed a **duty of care** on employers to protect workers and members of the public.

Health and safety law also gives wider latitude than environment law for trade union reps to tackle environmental issues. Provisions in the *HSWA* and the *Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977* require employers to consult with accredited union safety reps and gives safety reps legal powers to regularly inspect workplaces, investigate accidents, industrial diseases and dangerous occurrences and hold joint safety committee meetings with employers.

Other health and safety law touches explicitly on workplace environmental issues that have an impact on the wider world.

The *Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002* govern the prevention and control of chemicals, carcinogens, biological agents and dusts. The new *REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals) Regulations*, which came into force in June 2007, establish a framework for testing chemicals before they are sold.

The *Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006* impose a duty on employers to manage asbestos in their premises and to dispose of it safely. The *Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992* deal with working environment issues such as ventilation and temperature.

More information: LRD's annual *Health and safety law* booklet describes health and safety law in detail and how trade unionists can use it.

Taxation

There are a number of taxes that were explicitly imposed on environmental grounds, such as the **landfill tax**. They are designed to work with market mechanisms to account for "external" costs of pollution and waste, which are not including in prices. For example, **fuel duty** is designed to push up the price of petrol and deter car use.

The **Climate Change Levy** was introduced in 2001 to encourage companies to improve energy efficiency and cut their carbon emissions. However, the revenue is returned through lower national insurance costs and through the Carbon Trust.

In 2006, the government increased **Air Passenger Duty**, aimed at reducing CO_2 emissions. In the 2007 Budget the upper bands of **Vehicle Excise Duty** were increased to affect "gas guzzling" cars.

Other instruments

The government has encouraged companies to adopt environmental management systems, such as the EU's Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) and the international standard ISO 14001 to improve their performance. The T&G general union (now Unite) argues that EMAS is the most comprehensive system to use. In March 2007, there were 64 organisations with 359 sites in the UK with EMAS accreditation.

The **Renewables Obligation** is a legislative order that came into force in 2002. It requires licensed electricity suppliers in the UK to source at least part of their electricity from renewable generation. It started at 3% in 2002-03 and reaches 10.4% in 2010-11.

In the 2007 Budget, the government set targets for energy suppliers to introduce better insulation and boilers for customers, promised to press the EU for reductions in VAT on energy efficient appliances in the home and to phase out filament light bulbs. The government is also holding a UK competition to build the world's first, full-scale demonstration of Carbon Capture and Storage (CSS), in a bid to develop a technology which could help curb climate change.

The Climate Change Bill

In March 2007, the government published a draft Climate Change Bill for consultation, aimed at "moving the UK to a low-carbon economy".

The key points in the Bill are:

- a target for reducing carbon dioxide emissions in the UK by 60% by 2050;
- a target for reducing UK CO_2 emissions by 26%-32% by 2020;
- five-year carbon budgets;
- setting up an expert Committee on Climate Change; and
- annual reporting of progress to parliament by the committee.

The reductions are expected to be achieved through a variety of strategies, including investment in low-carbon fuels and technologies, such as carbon capture and storage, wind, wave and solar power, more efficient use of energy and changing the way energy suppliers operate.

The government has championed **carbon trading** and the creation of a carbon market and carbon "price". The Kyoto Protocol in 1997 established the principle of trading between governments and businesses and the European Emissions Trading Scheme has operated since 2005, covering 10,000 plants in the power generation, steel, glass, cement, ceramics and paper sectors.

There is currently a government consultation taking place on building new nuclear power facilities. It has also supported **carbon-offsetting** schemes and is seeking to negotiate targets at international level with the view of a new international framework being established after the Kyoto agreement expires in 2012.

More information: Draft Climate Change Bill, www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm70/7040/7040.pdf

International action

The third report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), published in May 2007 argues that: "There is substantial economic potential for the mitigation of global GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions over the coming decades, that could offset the

projected growth of global emissions or reduce emissions below current levels".

The report calls for a mixture of measures, designed to cut carbon emissions using existing technologies, switching to renewables, gas, nuclear and biofuels, as well as energy saving for buildings, cutting waste and better public transport.

The IPCC reports are expected to underpin a new international treaty on climate change to replace the Kyoto agreement, due to be signed at the end of 2007.

More information: IPCC, 2007, *Climate Change 2007: Mitigation of Climate Change*, www.ipcc.ch/SPM040507.pdf

Environment groups, campaigns and demands

There are dozens of environmental campaigns in the UK and most trade unionists will be aware of high profile groups, such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth (see Further information).

Some unions have strong links to environmental campaigns at national and local level. The PCS public and commercial services union is affiliated to Friends of the Earth.

In 2006, UNISON public services union affiliated to Stop Climate Chaos, a new coalition set up to campaign on climate change. And in February 2007, UNISON and PCS supported Greenpeace's successful court case, which forced the government to consult again on building new nuclear reactors.

Unions and the TUC have also supported environment days of action, marches and protests — for example, annual international demonstrations on climate change, such as the one that took place in November 2006.

Criticism of government policy

Environment groups and campaigners publish useful information explaining the scale of environmental degradation and what can be done about it. Many are critical of government policy, including green campaigner and journalist George Monbiot who has called the government's overall approach to climate change "greenwash".

During 2007, Monbiot commissioned scientists at University College London (UCL) to audit the government's environment strategy. The study found that current policies will only reduce carbon emissions by 12%-17% by 2020, well short of the government's target of 60%. The scientists also pointed to "oversights, elisions and deception" in the government's policy.

The government's targets have also been criticised in other ways. Firstly, the 60% reduction of CO_2 by 2050 has been described as too conservative, with campaigners calling for 80% or 90% cuts by mid-century and for other greenhouse gases to be included. Secondly, ecologists want aviation and shipping included in government targets (they are currently excluded), as they are the fastest growing sources of carbon emissions. The Big Ask campaign wants annual targets to reduce emissions including for individual firms.

Campaigners also highlight the failings of the European Emissions Trading Scheme. Firms were originally given generous permits, which did not create a high price for carbon or drive them to reduce emissions. After two years of operation, German power plants had made windfall profits of £8 billion on the scheme and UK firms made £1 billion, while overall emissions rose across the EU. (*The Guardian*, 3 April 2007)

Similarly, **carbon offsetting** has proven to be highly irregular, with "carbon cowboy" companies offering to plant trees without the means to do so, or to cut pollution they were planning to reduce anyway and pocket more cash. (*Financial Times*, 26 April 2007)

Environmental groups also argue that environmental taxation is simply not high enough to change behaviour. According to the Office for National Statistics figures, environmental taxes as a percentage of national income (GDP) have been falling in recent years. In 2005, the proportion fell to 2.9% of GDP compared with 3.5% in 2000. Similarly, environmental taxes as a percentage of total taxes have decreased since 2000. In 2005 they were 7.7%, down from 9.4% in 1997.

On the energy sector, environmental campaigners are keenest on renewables such as wind, tidal and solar power and want the government to do more to promote them. Most environmental

campaigns also criticise the government's support for biofuels and for nuclear energy.

On biofuels, George Monbiot argues that they set up competition between food and fuel. He believes that the promotion of biofuels has already forced up the price of maize and wheat and that it is accelerating deforestation.

Transport is another major environmental issue where campaigners have criticised the government.

The government's own figures show that the cost of environmentally friendly transport has risen over the last decade, while higher polluting forms have got cheaper. In a parliamentary written answer on 4 May 2006, transport minister Stephen Ladyman said: "Between 1997 and 2005 the real cost of motoring declined by 9%. Bus and coach fares increased by 15% and rail fares increased by 5%."

The government's aviation policy draws particular ire from environmental campaigners. The Aviation White Paper 2003 gave the green light for new runways as the government's predicted the doubling of air travel by 2030. In response, campaigners have launched campaigns such as the Airport Pledge and "enough is enough" to cut air travel.

Demands for action

Environment groups also put forward important ideas to prevent climate change and promote sustainability. Amongst their demands are:

On energy generation:

- action to reduce the use of fossil fuels;
- increased investment in renewable and sustainable energy such as solar, wind and wave power;
- decommissioning of nuclear power; and
- a moratorium on biofuels.

On energy efficiency:

- higher standards for insulation on all new buildings;
- a programme to insulate older buildings; and
- free home insulation.

On transport:

- integrated transport systems to provide an alternative to the car;
- large investment in expanding rail, bus, tram, light rail and underground networks;
- cheap or free public transport;
- minimum fuel consumption requirements on all cars and lorries;
- safe cycle routes (separated from traffic);
- a halt to road building programmes;
- a halt to airport expansion;
- an end to the fuel tax subsidy to airlines; and
- rationing of air travel.

International:

- a new international treaty to cut carbon dioxide emissions;
- cutting debt and trade restrictions to help sustainability in third world countries; and
- subsidies to stop the destruction of the rain forests and to support reforestation.

Other proposals:

- stiffer enforcement and penalties against corporate polluters;
- stricter regulation of all forms of industrial pollution;
- redesigning towns and cities to improve the environment;
- more facilities to increase recycling;
- locally grown food to reduce food miles; and
- shortening the working week and increasing holidays to facilitate lifestyle changes.

Further information

Guidance

Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC); www.Defra.gov.uk/environment/tusdac

TUC Sustainable workplace; www.tuc.org.uk

Environmental Practice at Work Publishing Co Ltd; tel: 01282 602829;www.epaw.co.uk

Envirowise; tel: 0800 585794; www.envirowise.gov.uk

Carbon Trust; tel: 0800 58 57 94; www.thecarbontrust.co.uk

Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra); www.defra.gov.uk

Environment Agency; www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution; www.rcep.org.uk

Campaigns

Campaign against Climate Change, Top Floor, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX; tel: 0207 8339311; www.campaigncc.org

Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ, tel: 020 7490 1555; www.foe.co.uk

Greenpeace; Canonbury Villas, London, N1 2PN; tel: 020 7865 8100; www.greenpeace.org.uk

SERA, 2nd Floor, 1 London Bridge, Downstream Building, London SE1 9BG; tel: 0207 022 1985; www.sera.org.uk

Stop Climate Chaos, 2 Chapel Place, London EC2A 3DQ; tel: 020 7729 8732; www.stopclimatechaos.org

Transport 2000, The Impact Centre, 12-18 Hoxton Street, London N1 6NG; tel: 020 7613 0743; www.transport2000.org.uk

Women's Environmental Network, PO Box 30626 London E1 1TZ; tel: 020 7481 9004; www.wen.org.uk

WWF-UK Panda House, Weyside Park, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR; tel: 01483 426444; www.wwf.org.uk

Climate science

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; www.ipcc.ch

Hadley Centre, www.met-office.gov.uk/research/hadleycentre

Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research; www.tyndall.ac.uk

UK Climate Impacts Centre (UKCIP); www.ukcip.org.uk

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For more information visit us on the web

www.cwu.org

Contact us:
Health Safety & Environment Dept
National Health & Safety Officer
Dave Joyce

Tel: 0208 971 7365/308
Email: djoyce@cwu.org

150 The Broadway
Wimbledon
London
SW19 1 RX